

Teachers Resource Guide

Anthony Johnson Transcript

Who are you and why are you at Jamestown (or in Virginia)? What year is it?

My name is Anthony Johnson and the year is 1643. I have been in Virginia for 22 years. I arrived in 1621 aboard the James. I worked for the Bennett family for over 10 years. I was brought to Virginia by force, and I have been able to attain my freedom.

Describe your daily activities

I am fortunate to have a wife, Mary, and two sons, John and Richard. Our daily activities include tending to our livestock and farming. We grow tobacco. Tobacco is the cash crop in Virginia. It requires a lot of labor which takes up a lot of our time. The crop year begins with the preparation of tobacco seedlings in late January and February. In April the seedlings are transplanted. During the summer the work is very hard. Virginia is not always a pleasant place during the summer. The heat and insects make life very difficult.

What do you think about the English settlers at Jamestown and in Virginia?

Virginia is a difficult place to live. I have seen many settlers come here and perish. I consider myself fortunate. I survived the [Powhatan Indian] Uprising of 1622 and I have witnessed many changes. In my years tobacco has become very important to the colony. If you can grow it successfully you can acquire wealth.

What expectations do you have for your future?

As an African I hope to continue to have my freedom. I have noticed recently that things are changing for people like me. Laws are being used to take away freedoms. I am a landowner which is the key to wealth and a better life in Virginia. Being a landowner will also benefit my children. I hope new laws won't be passed that will take away our land because we are Africans.

Items that would identify Anthony Johnson:

Plain shirt-as a freed servant, he not extremely well-off

Land contract-owning land was an important event for him and enabled him to have economic success

Tobacco plant-to show the importance of tobacco, the crop which he spent all day growing

Picture of a hoe head-one of the tools of his trade of growing tobacco